

Message Text

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CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON UK

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GE

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 MANAMA 0528

E.O. 11652 : XGDS-1

TAGS : MARR, BA

SUBJECT :MIDDLE EAST FORCE PRESENCE AND BAHRAINI POLITICAL SCENE

1. IN ANTICIPATION PENDING PARLIAMENTARY RESOLUTION ON MIDDLE EAST FORCE PRESENCE, IT MIGHT BE USEFUL TO ADDRESSEES IF WE ATTEMPT TO EXPLAIN SEEMINGLY CONTRADICTORY ATTITUDES IN BAHRAIN ON U.S. NAVY PRESENCE, PARTICULARLY WHY GOVERNMENT PROFESSES TO STRONGLY SUPPORT MIDDLE EAST FORCE PRESENCE WHILE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY APPARENTLY OPPOSES IT.

2. GOVERNMENT ATTITUDE-IN SEVERAL REPORTS OVER LAST YEAR WE HAVE TRIED TO SET FORTH OUR UNDERSTANDING GOB FOREIGN POLICY AND ITS ORIGINS. AL-KHALIFA FAMILY LEADERS, MOST NOTABLY AMIR AND PRIME MINISTER, DISPLAY STRONG PSYCHOLOGICAL URGE TO RETAIN LONG-STANDING CLOSE RELATIONS WITH ANGLO-AMERICANS, AND MIDDLE EAST FORCE PRESENCE IN SOME WAYS SYMBOLIZES TO THEM THIS TRADITIONAL RELATIONSHIP. MOST COMMONER MEMBERS OF CABINET, AT LEAST SUNNI ARAB MEMBERS SUCH AS SHIRAWI AND FAKHRO, HAVE A STRONG EMOTIONAL BACKGROUND OF ARAB NATIONALISM, AND DESPITE THEIR DESIRE FOR GOOD ECONOMIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL RELATIONS WITH

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THE MOMENT PERMIT. ALL MEMBERS OF CABINET RECOGNIZE BAHRAIN'S NEED TO GET ALONG WELL WITH SAUDI ARABIA AND IRAN AND ALL ADVOCATE A GOVERNMENT ECONOMIC AND DEVELOPMENT POLICY HOSPITABLE TO WESTERN PRESENCE, POLITICAL CONDITIONS PERMITTING. AS RESULT OF THESE ATTITUDES IN GOVERNMENT, WHEN U.S.-ARAB RELATIONS ARE REASONABLY GOOD AS AT PRESENT AND SAUDI ARABIA AND IRAN ACQUIESE IN OR SUPPORT U.S. NAVY PRESENCE IN BAHRAIN, THE CABINET APPEARS TO BE UNANIMOUS OR CLOSE TO IT IN ITS DESIRE FOR MIDDLE EAST FORCE TO CONTINUE OPERATING IN THE GULF OUT OF BAHRAIN. WHEN U.S.-ARAB RELATIONS GO SOUR, AS IN OCTOBER 1973, THE CABINET TENDS TO SPLIT ABOUT EVENLY BETWEEN THOSE TRADITIONALIST AL-KHALIFA FAMILY MEMBERS AND SHIA COMMONERS WHO ARE MORE PRO-WESTERN THAN ARAB NATIONALIST, AND THE "MODERNIST" GROUP WHICH IN THE PINCH FEELS GOB MUST PLACE ITS NEED TO SURVIVE IN THE ARAB WORLD ABOVE ITS POLITICAL TIES WITH U.S. GOB DECISION TO PERMIT MIDDLE EAST FORCE TO REMAIN, AS ADDRESSEES WELL AWARE, WAS TAKEN WITH MUCH SOUL-SEARCHING. DECISION APPEARS FIRM UNDER PRESENT POLITICAL CIRCUMSTANCES AND GOVERNMENT WOULD HAVE US BELIEVE IT IS FULLY PERSUADED THAT U.S. NAVY PRESENCE IS IN BAHRAIN'S NATIONAL INTEREST. AS FOREIGN MINISTER NOTED TO ME MAY 1, HOWEVER, THE RATIONALE BEHIND GOVERNMENT'S CONVICTION THAT NAVY PRESENCE SERVES BAHRAIN'S INTEREST IS A FAIRLY NUANCED AND SOPHISTICATED ONE, INVOLVING DIMLY PERCEIVED STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS AND CLEARLY PERCEIVED THOUGH INDIRECT ECONOMIC FACTORS.

3. NATIONAL ASSEMBLY - IN MAY 1 MEETING, FOREIGN MINISTER LAMENTED THAT IT DIFFICULT TO PRESENT GOVERNMENT'S NUANCED CASE TO A NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, MANY OF WHOSE MEMBERS ARE BARELY ABLE TO GRASP SIMPLE SLOGANS MUCH LESS COMPLICATED CONCEPTS. IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FORUM, AS RESULT OF MANY YEARS OF ARAB NATIONALIST ATTITUDES ABOUT FOREIGN MILITARY PRESENCE, THE SLOGANS ALL WORK AGAINST MIDDLE EAST FORCE. ONE-QUARTER OF THE ELECTED MEMBERS, THE RADICAL MARXIST OPPOSITION PEOPLE'S BLOC ARE DEAD SET AGAINST A U.S. NAVY PRESENCE OR ANY OTHER MANIFESTATION OF CLOSE U.S.-BAHRAINI RELATIONS. THE REACTIONARY SHIA RELIGIOUS LEADERS, WHO FORM ANOTHER ONE-QUARTER OF THE ELECTED REPRESENTATION, ARE GENERALLY INCLINED TO SUPPORT THE GOVERNMENT ON FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES, ARE CERTAINLY LITTLE SWAYED BY ARAB NATIONALIST SENTIMENT, AND
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ARE GENERALLY INCLINED TO FAVOR ANYTHING THAT HAS "ANTI-COMMUNIST" POTENTIAL. THEIR ENTHUSIASM FOR THE U.S. NAVY PRESENCE, HOWEVER, IS DAMPENED SUBSTANTIALY BY THE FACT THAT IN GENERAL THEY ARE OPPOSED TO WESTERN PHYSICAL PRESENCE IN BAHRAIN BECAUSE OF ITS EFFECTS ON THE TRADITIONAL SOCIETY. WHILE THE LINKAGE BETWEEN THE MIDDLE EAST FORCE PRESENCE AND THE BAHRAIN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL TENDS TO MAKE MODERNISTS BOTH IN THE CABINET AND THE ASSEMBLY MORE SYMPATHETIC TO THE U.S.

NAVY PRESENCE, THE RELIGIOUS BLOC PROBABLY REGARDS THE BAHRAIN SCHOOL AS A SOURCE OF "CORRUPTION" MATCHED ONLY BY THE GROWING PRESENCE OF GULF AIR STEWARDESSES. HENCE, THE RIGHT WING DEPUTIES' SUPPORT FOR THE GOVERNMENT'S POSITION ON THE NAVY PRESENCE IS FAR FROM UNQUALIFIED, AND THESE DEPUTIES PARTICULARLY ARE EASILY SWAYED BY THE CONFUSION AND EMOTION OF PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE. THE REMAINING HALF OF THE ELECTED ASSEMBLY MEMBERS, THE SO-CALLED "MODERATES", DO NOT YET OPERATE EFFECTIVELY AS A PARLIAMENTARY BLOC. WHILE THEIR BASIC VIEWS ON MOST ISSUES TEND TO COINCIDE WITH THOSE OF THE GOVERNMENT, THEY ARE EXTREMELY JEALOUS OF THEIR INDEPENDENCE AND BY NO MEANS INCLINED TO ACT AS A GOVERNMENT "PARTY" IN THIS FLEDGLING NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. SOME OF THE MODERATES ARE AS SUSCEPTIBLE TO ARAB NATIONALIST EMOTIONS AS ARE SOME OF THE CABINET MEMBERS AND EVEN AMONG THE SHIA MEMBERS OF THIS GROUP THERE ARE STRONG "ANTI-COLONIAL" TENDENCIES. IN SHORT, THE MODERATES HAVE NO FIRM IDEOLOGICAL BIAS TOWARD RETAINING THE U.S. NAVAL PRESENCE AND, HENCE, ARE NOT ABOVE PLAYING POLITICS WITH THE ISSUE.

4. AS A RESULT, THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICY OF RETAINING THE MIDDLE EAST FORCE PRESENCE HAS FEW IF ANY FIRM FRIENDS AMONG

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THE ELECTED MEMBERS OF THE ASSEMBLY. IT WOULD, HOWEVER, BE MISLEADING TO EXAGGERATE THE BITTERNESS OF THE ASSEMBLY'S OPPOSITION TO THE PRESENCE. WE HAVE CONSISTENTLY BEEN TOLD THAT THE MODERATES FOR INSTANCE ARE GENERALLY DELIGHTED TO SEE THE U.S. NAVY REMAIN SO LONG AS THE ISSUE OF THE MIDDLE EAST FORCE PRESENCE DOES NOT HAVE TO COME BEFORE THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR A VOTE. THE OPPOSITION PEOPLE'S BLOC DOES NOT REGARD THE MIDDLE EAST FORCE QUESTION AS THE MOST BURNING POLITICAL ISSUE IN BAHRAIN. ITS PROBLEM IS THAT THE VERY SUCCESS OF THE GOVERNMENT IN HANDLING THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY THIS SEASON HAS PREVENTED THE PEOPLE'S BLOC TO DATE FROM GETTING A GOOD HANDLE ON THE ISSUES THAT MOST CONCERN IT, SUCH AS THE SECURITY DECREE AND LABOR LEGISLATION. HENCE, IN ITS FRUSTRATION, THE PEOPLE'S BLOC IS FORCED TO MAKE THE BEST OF A LESSER ISSUE, THE MIDDLE EAST FORCE PRESENCE, TO EMBARRASS THE GOVERNMENT. IT IS A HANDY ISSUE FOR THEM SINCE IT PERMITS THE UNLIMBERING ALL OF THE ANTI-COLONIAL, ANTI-FOREIGN MILITARY PRESENCE AND, BY EXTENSION, ANTI-ZIONIST SLOGANS THAT MOST MEN ON THE BAHRAIN STREETS CHERISH. IN THIS POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT IT IS DIFFICULT FOR THE MODERATE ELEMENT IN THE ASSEMBLY NOT TO JOIN THE PACK IN PUBLIC DENUNCIATION OF THE
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NAVY PRESENCE, OR AT LEAST TO SIT OUT THE FIGHT BY ABSTENTION, PARTICULARLY WHEN ASKED TO VOTE ON A SENSE OF PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION HAVING NO LEGISLATIVE FORCE. UNLESS THE GOVERNMENT HANDLES THE DEBATE WITH EXCEPTIONAL SKILL AND LUCK, EVEN THE CONSERVATIVE RELIGIOUS LEADERS MIGHT BE INCLINED NOT TO RALLY TO THE GOVERNMENT'S SUPPORT ON THIS ISSUE.

5. RESOLUTIONS VS. LEGISLATION - THE ABOVE PERHAPS EXPLAINS WHY THE GOVERNMENT FEARS IT MAY BE WITHOUT SUPPORT ON THE PENDING RESOLUTION, WITH MOST IF NOT ALL THOSE MEMBERS WHO VOTE CASTING THEIR VOTE AGAINST THE POLICY OF RETAINING MIDDLE EAST FORCE. SHOULD, HOWEVER, THIS LEAD THE PEOPLE'S BLOC TO TRY IN THE PARLIAMENTARY SESSION BEGINNING NEXT FALL TO LEGISLATE THE U.S. NAVY OUT OF BAHRAIN, THE GOVERNMENT'S ABILITY TO DEFEAT ACTUAL LEGISLATION WOULD BE SUBSTANTIALLY STRONGER THAN ITS POWER TO HEAD OFF A "SENSE OF PARLIAMENT" RESOLUTION. SUCH LEGISLATION WOULD BE A MAJOR TEST OF STRENGTH BETWEEN THE OPPOSITION AND THE GOVERNMENT AND WITH THE CHIPS REALLY DOWN ON BOTH CONSTITUTIONAL AND POLICY GROUNDS, WE WOULD EXPECT A NUMBER OF MODERATE AND CONSERVATIVE RELIGIOUS DEPUTIES TO SUPPORT THE GOVERNMENT. CERTAINLY THE GOVERNMENT WOULD TWIST MANY AN ARM TO ACHIEVE THIS SUPPORT. WITH 14 MINISTERS VOTING ON SUCH LEGISLATION, IN ADDITION TO THE 30 ELECTED MEMBERS, IT WOULD, IN OUR ASSESSMENT, BE EXTREMELY DIFFICULT FOR THE PEOPLE'S BLOC TO ACHIEVE A MAJORITY IN THE ASSEMBLY IN FAVOR OF EXPELLING U.S. NAVY.

6. GOB ATTITUDE - THE PARLIAMENTARY AND CONSTITUTIONAL EXPERIMENTS IN BAHRAIN ARE STILL NEW AND IMPORTANT PRECEDENTS ARE BEING SET. MOREOVER, THE GOVERNMENT IS HARD- PRESSED TO DEAL WITH A NUMBER OF SERIOUS POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC/SOCIAL ISSUES ON WHICH SUPPORT FOR ITS POLICIES AMONG THE PEOPLE AND THEIR REPRESENTATIVES IS BY NO MEANS PERMANENTLY ASSURED. WHILE THE GOVERNMENT MAY BE CONFIDENT THAT IT COULD WIN A PARLIAMENTARY TEST OF STRENGTH ON THE MIDDLE EAST FORCE ISSUE, IT OBVIOUSLY CONSIDERS THIS A BATTLE IT WOULD PREFER TO AVOID IF AT ALL POSSIBLE. WE BELIEVE THAT THIS IS THE REASON THE CABINET IS PRESENTLY AGONIZING OVER TACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN CONNECTION WITH CONTINUED U.S. NAVY PRESENCE IN BAHRAIN, HOPING TO FIND A WAY TO KEEP THE U.S. NAVY WITHOUT A BITTER PARLIAMENTARY FIGHT WHICH WOULD INCREASE POLITICAL
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